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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0534  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2465  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2491  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000094

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [KISL](#) [JA](#) [RP](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: EARLY FEBRUARY PROXIMITY TALKS BETWEEN PHILIPPINES  
AND MILF

REF: A. MANILA 238 - ARROYO REVISES MILF PEACE PROPOSAL

[1](#)B. KUALA LUMPUR 4 - AMBASSADOR MEETS DPM NAJIB

Classified By: Political Section Chief Mark D. Clark for reasons 1.4 (b  
and d).

Summary

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[1](#)1. (S) Malaysian facilitator for the Philippines (GRP)/Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace talks Othman Abdul Razak held proximity talks between GRP and MILF negotiators in early February, following the failure of the December 2007 round. Othman and the MILF regretted that the GRP side was not empowered to discuss "governance" issues. Othman said treatment of "self-determination" was the key sticking point, and this might be resolved through a secret codicil. Othman proposed but did not have agreement yet on another executive session on February 18. He noted an up-tick in violence in Mindanao since December. After the December talks fizzled, Malaysia had given notice to the GRP that Malaysia could withdraw its International Monitoring Team (IMT) members at any time if Manila were not serious in the negotiations. Othman spoke positively about possible expanded Japanese participation in the IMT, and he suggested Japan, Malaysia and the U.S. as potential guarantors of a future peace agreement. Othman said that earlier he had relayed information from Embassy Manila DCM to the MILF clarifying the humanitarian nature of the Balikatan exercise in the southern Philippines, thereby helping to correct misunderstanding among MILF commanders. End Summary.

Peace Process

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[1](#)2. (C) During a 90-minute meeting with polchief on February 10, Othman explained that he had conducted executive sessions between GRP and MILF negotiators on February 1-2 in Kuala Lumpur. These sessions, which took the form of proximity talks, were the first since the collapse of the December 2007 round. The GRP delegation did not arrive empowered to discuss the governance issues, a critical area in Othman's view. Othman and the MILF did not believe the process could move forward to the signing of an interim memorandum without addressing the governance "strand." While not authorized to discuss such issues, the GRP delegation agreed to go back to Manila with ideas for consideration in the governance area. (Comment: Philippine contacts told Embassy Manila that they would seek Cabinet approval for some reference to self governance in the territorial agreement currently under debate, but suggested it was the MILF's strong objection to

discussing related constitutional issues that kept self governance off the agenda. End Comment.)

13. (S) At the heart of the governance issue, Othman explained, is treatment of "self-determination," a term included in several previous documents signed by the two sides. GRP fears that use of "self-determination" creates a "small loophole" for the MILF to press for independence. The MILF for its part believes it must keep the term in the agreement in order to assuage hard-liners and not appear to be backsliding. Othman stated that one possible solution would be the signing of a secret codicil, which would clarify that self-determination must take place within the Republic of the Philippines and does not represent an option for independence. As in past meetings, Othman referred to Moro independence as "not viable" and "not realistic."

14. (C) Othman proposed that the GRP and MILF meet again for an executive session on February 18, but the two sides had not yet confirmed. Othman said his best-case scenario would have the two sides prepared to sign the interim document by late March or early April, but he did not express particular confidence this would come about.

15. (C) In response to polchief's query, Othman noted an up-tick in violence in Mindanao since December, including bombing of electricity transmission towers. When asked who was responsible, he said, "the MILF should not and would not claim responsibility," and if the MILF started to acknowledge such acts it would be a signal the negotiations were over.

16. (C) Polchief asked for confirmation that Malaysia's current commitment to the International Monitoring Team (IMT) runs through August 2008. Othman responded that after the failure of the December round, Malaysia "gave notice" to the

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GRP that Malaysia could withdraw its IMT members at any time if there were not sufficient progress in the talks. Othman stated that Malaysia had no interest in helping the Philippines Armed Forces maintain a cease-fire with the MILF if the Philippines government were not serious about a negotiated solution.

17. (C) Polchief raised Japan's involvement in Mindanao. (Comment: A Japanese diplomat informed us that a delegation from Tokyo had visited Kuala Lumpur in January, in part to discuss Mindanao and the peace process. End Comment.) Othman said he welcomed a greater Japanese role in Mindanao, including more development funding and Japanese engagement with MILF's economic development arm. Othman also spoke positively about the possibility that Japanese Self Defense Force members might join the IMT, and said the MILF likely would approve of this.

18. (C) Othman stated that an eventual peace agreement should include international guarantors to help ensure implementation and instill confidence in the MILF. He noted Malaysia and Japan for such a role, and "possibly" the United States.

Balikatan

19. (C) At the request of Embassy Manila, polchief provided Othman with written background information on the current Balikatan joint military exercise in the Philippines. Othman said that following an earlier communication from Embassy Manila DCM (Othman) had immediately provided the MILF with clarification as to the humanitarian nature of Balikatan in the southern Philippines. Othman said some MILF commanders, including "Commander Bravo," originally had misunderstood the nature of the Balikatan activities and had felt threatened.

Comment

¶10. (C) Othman continues to work away at the talks, despite his disappointment with the December round. He appeared fairly firm that the GRP must also address governance issues at this stage of the negotiations. While Malaysia has not gone through with repeated past threats to walk away, we have heard Malaysia's frustrations over the lack of progress and impatience with the IMT's prolonged mission from other senior Malaysian government officials, including from Deputy Prime Minister/Defense Minister Najib Tun Razak (ref B.).  
KEITH